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The Memorial of S. A. Ashe

To the General Assembly:

The Memorial of your petitioner respectfully represents:

1. That some years ago your petitioner was led by public and private considerations to undertake the preparation of a history of the State; and that the first volume of said history, covering the period from the explorations in 1584 to the Treaty of Peace in 1783, has been published.

2. That because of its educational value, the Superintendent of Public Instruction and other educators deemed it proper and desirable to have it distributed and made accessible to readers in every part of the State.

That it was considered advisable to ask the General Assembly to authorize the County Boards of Education to purchase a copy for the use of each Rural School Library in their counties, under an arrangement as to price, finish and binding which the Superintendent of Education should approve; and a bill embodying these provisions was introduced at the last session of the Assembly, was favorably reported, and passed the Senate.

3. That the bill was favorably reported by the Committee on Education of the House; but Speaker Graham desiring to be heard, it was rereferred; and he urged before the Committee that the book was objectionable because it did not sustain the view held by many persons that the true date of the Mecklenburg Declaration was May 20. After hearing Speaker Graham at length, the full Committee, with only one dissenting voice, again reported the bill favorably. The bill passed the House, but at the request of the Speaker it was reconsidered. The session was near its close, and many important matters pressed, so the House allowed only a short time for debate. Speaker Graham and Representative Dowd, of Mecklenburg, made earnest appeals for the rejection of the bill, and over the protests of Mr. Connor and other members of the Committee, the House yielded to their appeals; some saying that the matter could be taken up at a subsequent session.

4. The only objection made to the bill was that the history was unsound on the subject of the Mecklenburg Declaration. The Committee had after full investigation passed on that matter, but the other members of the House had no time to ex-

amine it. Indeed, Speaker Graham had never thoroughly examined the book; nor had many other members. Nor would the General Assembly probably attempt to settle by legislative action a disputed historical matter which every man of intelligence interested in such matters will have his own opinion about.

5. If an error has been made in regard to the details of any important transaction, it is the province of history to present it correctly. North Carolinians, a brave race, have the courage to correct errors and to stand for the truth. Indeed it is not to be supposed that any one wishes a history that is incorrect.

Some fifty years after independence was declared by Mecklenburg County, in the absence of any contemporaneous document, Col. Alexander in writing an account of the proceedings made an innocent error in the date. Documents and newspapers of June, 1775, have subsequently come to light, and the error has been made plain.

6. Ashe's History gives many pages of quotations from the evidence, old as well as new, and states all the circumstances bearing on the subject, so that every reader can form his own conclusion. If the evidence shows the truth to be that the date was May 31, it is not the right of the historian to suppress it. Indeed whether the date was the 20th or the 31st can not be important. Why, then, make so much objection to the true date? Nor is the language important, so that there was a Declaration of Independence.

The book shows that on May 31 the people of Mecklenburg declared independence.

7. The evidence is all documentary. It consists of newspapers and letters of 1775, and of statements made by participants in 1800, 1819, and 1830. No student who studies this evidence today can well reach any other conclusion than that reached by your petitioner. Your petitioner has not been influenced by the opinion of others, yet he is glad to understand that Governor William A. Graham, whose father and uncle were among those who made statements in 1819 and 1830, just before his death also came to the conclusion that the true date was May 31.

8. Your petitioner respectfully represents that the action of the Assembly in rejecting the book as detailed, after having passed the bill, is tantamount to putting the seal of condemnation upon it, and this would be a great injury to your petitioner; wherefore your petitioner prays that the General Assembly in its wisdom may now take appropriate action in the premises.

S. A. ASHE.

Raleigh, N. C., November, 1910.

Mecklenburg Declares Independence

Indeed, so far from the people of North Carolina being indifferent or supine, a step forward was now taken in Mecklenburg County that was far in advance of the desires of either Hooper, Hewes, or Caswell, or their associates in Congress. It was a declaration of independence. In March and April there had been many meetings of the Committee of Safety in Mecklenburg. The occupation of Boston by a hostile British army was a thorn in the flesh. The inhabitants of that town were suffering from their adherence to the rights of America, and again the cry rang throughout Mecklenburg that the cause of Boston was the cause of all. In May came the exciting news that Parliament in its address to the King had declared the colonies in rebellion, and therefore out of the protection of the law. The leaders felt that a storm was about to burst on the heads of the patriotic people. It was determined to prepare for it. Public meetings were held in various parts of the county, and the prevailing sentiment was found to be one of resolution. After conference, Colonel Thomas Polk, the commanding officer of the county, called for an election of two representatives from each of the nine militia districts of the county to take into consideration the state of the country and to adopt such measures as seemed necessary to safeguard their liberties. The election was held and amid great excitement the delegates convened at Charlotte, and with them came their friends and neighbors, so that nearly one-half of all the arms-bearing men of the county assembled in that little hamlet. As great as was the occasion, the excitement was largely increased by the arrival of the news of the battle of Lexington, which had swept through the country like a whirlwind, stirring the people to the profoundest depths. To the meeting came all the leading inhabitants, the Polks, Alexanders, Brevards, Davidsons, and all who were leaders in thought and action. They met on the 30th day of May, in the court-house, and Abraham Alexander was called to the chair. A number of papers were read. Stress was laid on the action of Parliament declaring the colonies in rebellion. As they were held to be rebels, the leaders urged that they should renounce their allegiance and declare themselves independent. An objection was made: If we resolve on independence, how shall we be absolved from the oath of allegiance we took after the Regulation battle? With hot indignation the answer came—That allegiance and protection were reciprocal; when protection was withdrawn, allegiance ceased. Independence was resolved on, and a committee composed of Dr. Ephraim Brevard and others was appointed to prepare the resolutions. The discussion continued far into the night, and then the delegates adjourned to reassemble at noon. At twelve o'clock the following day, the delegates again met and the resolutions prepared by Dr. Brevard were read and adopted.

It was resolved that all commissions granted by the Crown were null and void; that no other authority than that of the Continental Congress and the provincial congresses existed in any of the colonies; that military officers should be elected who should hold their offices independent of Great Britain, and an independent local government was provided for.

These bold resolutions having been adopted by the delegates, it was determined that the action taken should be proclaimed at the court-house door, and be formally announced to the people, who, animated by



ardor, patriotism and excitement, had come together in great numbers to participate in the proceedings of the day. Colonel Polk, the leader in the measure, standing on the high steps of the court-house, read the resolutions to the eager crowd; and the people with much enthusiasm approved and endorsed this first assertion of independence. As a manifestation of their approval cheers were given, hats were thrown into the air, and with enthusiastic applause the people ratified the great action taken by the delegates. Mecklenburg thus first gave expression to that spirit of independence which later developed elsewhere, finally leading to a total abandonment of all desire for reconciliation with the mother country.

By these resolves all laws and commissions emanating from the royal government were annulled, and the former civil constitutions of the colonies were declared wholly suspended; and also it was declared that no other power existed in any of the provinces but the provincial congresses under the direction of the Continental Congress.

It being decreed that all laws, commissions, and authority were abrogated, there was established a new government to replace the old one. The plan provided that the inhabitants of the county should form themselves into nine military companies, and choose a colonel and other military officers, who should hold their power by virtue of the people's choice, and independent of the Crown and of the former constitution of the province; that each of these companies should appoint two freeholders to exercise judicial functions under the name of "selectmen"; that these eighteen "selectmen" should hold a court for the county, and should meet at Charlotte quarterly for that purpose.

It was further decreed that any person thereafter receiving any commission from the Crown, or attempting to exercise any commission theretofore received, should be deemed an enemy to the country and should be apprehended. * * *

These resolutions of the people of Mecklenburg completely overthrowing the colonial government and establishing a free and independent government founded on the will of the people, were published on June 16, 1775, at New Bern, in the *North Carolina Gazette*, and on June 13th in the newspaper at Charleston, and in the *Cape Fear Mercury*, published at Wilmington, probably in its issue of June 23d. Their publication produced a profound impression. The action at Mecklenburg, indeed, stirred the hearts of the patriot leaders and awoke enthusiasm in the breasts of their associates throughout the colony, while they aroused the ire of Governor Martin and caused dismay among the adherents of the Crown. * * *

* * * That it was generally understood that these resolves constituted a declaration of independence, while establishing a new government, is evident from the records of the Moravian Church at Bethania of events occurring during the year 1775. "I can not but remark at the end of the 1775th year," wrote the annalist, "during the summer of this year, that in the month of May or June the county of Mecklenburg, in North Carolina, declared itself free and independent of England, and made such arrangements for the administration of justice, which proceeding the Continental Congress at this time considered premature; afterward, however, the Continental Congress later extended same over the whole country."

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